

How a Road Gets Built Fact Sheet

The following outlines major elements of the road building process, some of which occur concurrently. All are reflected in Virginia's Six-Year Program, which is updated annually and includes projects in "development" or "construction." For the former, construction funding is currently unavailable. A project typically enters the "construction" phase when right-of-way acquisition begins and an advertised date has been set for work to begin, and when actual construction will begin within six years. Public comment is solicited and welcome at many points throughout the process. It is best to get involved as early as possible in the transportation decision-making process.

1. Planning (6-24 months)

- Often acting upon requests for road improvements from local governments, VDOT planners work with federal and other state agencies, local governments, regional planning organizations, and residents to develop short- and long-range plans for improving the highway system.
- Factors they consider include development and land-use plans, traffic patterns and level of service, environmental and economic impacts, cost and revenue estimates, and safety.
- They also employ traffic management tools and new technology to maximize use of existing facilities.
- Based on technical information and public input, the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) citizen panel appointed by the Governor, annually updates Virginia's six-year transportation improvement plan.

2. Design (15-24 months)

- The initial step is to determine the size, type and location of a roadway. This is based on anticipated traffic volume, the roadway's intended function (interstate, state or local), and terrain (rural, urban, mountainous, flat).
- A preliminary design is prepared and reviewed by all stakeholders in the project, such as affected property owners and local governments.
- Sometimes offering two or more possible proposals, VDOT conducts public hearings to involve citizens before making a final decision on location and details such as right-of-way width, type of intersections and interchanges, and materials needed. Hearings are held after at least 30 days' notice by newspaper advertisement and other notices, and citizens have 10 days to offer comments or documents about the proposed location or design after the hearing.
- The CTB must approve the location and major design features before final design and right-of-way acquisition can begin.

3. Environment (9-36 months)

- Before construction can begin, VDOT environmental experts in fields such as biology, noise and air quality, archaeology, architecture, and wildlife ensure that environmental issues are addressed in the planning, development, construction and maintenance of the highway system.
- VDOT must comply with 67 regulations imposed by 27 state and federal agencies. For projects that could significantly affect the environment, the National Environmental Policy Act requires an Environmental Impact Statement that fully describes the potential effects of all reasonable alternatives.

4. Right of Way (6-21 months)

- Once the CTB approves the final design, VDOT's right of way and utilities office issues a "Notice to Proceed," authorizing its agents to begin negotiations with landowners. To develop a purchase offer of what VDOT considers to be fair market value, for parcels valued at \$10,000 or less, a negotiator prepares a Basic Acquisition Report; for other parcels, a licensed appraiser does an appraisal. If an owner rejects VDOT's offer and an amicable agreement cannot be reached, VDOT can acquire property through eminent domain, a provision in state law that authorizes the state to acquire private property for public use. Between the initiation of the eminent domain proceedings and litigation, VDOT tries to reach a settlement with property owners.
- When relocation is necessary, VDOT does its best to ensure that owners and tenants are moved to desirable locations with as little inconvenience as possible. VDOT assistance includes providing information about available housing, and help with assessing whether a new residence meets state and federal guidelines. Homeowners and renters who have occupied the property for at least 90 days before negotiations began might be eligible for financial compensation. If comparable housing is not available within compensation limits, there might be options under a "last resort" housing program. VDOT will pay reasonable moving expenses up to 50 miles.
- A business, farm or non-profit organization can be reimbursed for moving costs up to 50 miles, and, in some instances, for loss of tangible personal property and the expense of seeking a replacement site.
- Utility companies are contacted about relocating water, sewer, gas, electric and phone lines, and all necessary permits and authorizations are obtained before work begins.

5. Construction (12-36 months)

- Based upon an engineering estimate of what will be required to build a road, VDOT invites contractors to bid on a project, and the CTB awards a contract to the lowest qualified bidder, stipulating cost and length of time for completion.
- Overseeing every step of the work, VDOT inspects for quality, conformity to project requirements, and environmental protection.
- VDOT inspectors manage traffic flow through the project, keeping affected property owners informed and ensuring that work zone safety guidelines are met.
- Once a project is completed, a road is opened only after a satisfactory inspection.

Note: Construction delays can be expected, typically caused by weather, late delivery of materials, and unforeseen discoveries such as underground streams or unstable soil.